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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iran Middle East - Palestinian and Israeli Elections

PARIS - Tuesday, January 10, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iran
Middle East - Palestinian and Israeli Elections

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

No single story leads today. Instead today's headlines range from "Avian Flu: The Epidemic Progresses" for Le Figaro; "Sharon's Successor" and "Olmert to Follow Sharon" (Liberation and Le Monde) to "What Europe Expects for France" (La Croix). In the economic press, La Tribune headlines "Financial Markets Start the Year with a Roar" while Les Echos titles "Growth and Employment: The French Morose." Les Echos publishes the result of a poll indicating that 72 percent of respondents are pessimistic about employment opportunities. Both Les Echos and La Tribune report on the good prospects for EADS, the parent company of Airbus: "EADS Confident Despite Boeing's Return" (Les Echos); "EADS's Order Book Full" (La Tribune).

In other news, Le Monde and Le Figaro report on a story developed by a German language Swiss weekly, SonntagsBlick, on January 8, indicating that the Swiss government intercepted a confidential fax transmission between the Egyptian Foreign

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Affairs Ministry and its London Mission, written in French, reporting that "the Egyptian government 'had its own proof' that Romania allowed the CIA to interrogate 23 Iraqi and Afghan citizens on its territory." Le Monde adds: "the note also indicates that similar interrogation centers exist in Ukraine, Kosovo, Macedonia and Bulgaria." According to Le Monde, the Swiss government is investigating the leak. Le Figaro reports that the German weekly could be liable under the Swiss military penal Code for revealing the story. It also reports that the five nations mentioned in the confidential note "continue to adamantly deny the existence of CIA prisons on their territory."

Coverage of the French hostage's return to France is widespread in written outlets and the electronic media. All reports emphasize his "discretion" about the conditions of his detention and release and on the different versions circulating about whether he escaped or was released.

Iran's stance on resuming its sensitive nuclear work is reported in Le Figaro in an article entitled "A New Provocation From Tehran," while several regional editorials comment on Iran's "nuclear threat." (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Iran

"A New Provocation From Tehran"
Maurin Picard in right-of-center Le Figaro (01/10):
"Yesterday, Iran crossed a new boundary. Ignoring the warnings from the international community, Tehran announced it was resuming its research activities on nuclear production. The international community believes that although research does not mean production, Iran may be returning to proliferation activities. Under the present conditions it is highly unlikely that the negotiations with the EU-3 will resume as scheduled on the 18th. If Iran does not back down, the next step will most probably be an ultimatum to Iran: either it stops its nuclear activities or the issue will be brought before the UN."

"A Complicated Middle East"
Jean-Claude Kiefer in regional Les Dernieres Nouvelles d'Alsace (01/10): "The International Atomic Energy Agency, although an arm of the UN, carries no weight with Tehran. Neither does the EU-3. The Mullahs seem also to be ignoring the U.S. Iran is fanatical enough to use the bomb to attack Israel and pro-Western Arab nations. This alone could incite Egypt and Saudi Arabia to also develop their own atomic weapon. As if the Middle East weren't complicated enough."

"A Fanatical Regime"

Jean-Francois Montremont in regional *Le Courrier Picard* (01/10): "Those who hold the reins in Iran are so locked into their paranoia that they have created a parallel army with more sophisticated weapons than the traditional Iranian army, in whom they have very little confidence. If by mishap a tactical nuclear bomb were to come out of the Ispahan nuclear laboratory, it would be handed to the 'Guardians of the Revolution,' the militant group from which comes the current President of Iran. The dangerousness of the regime is clear to all. And the idea that the U.S. might one day be tempted by a military adventure similar to the Iraqi adventure is frightening."

Middle East - Palestinian and Israeli Elections

"Instabilities"

Gerard Dupuy in left-of-center *Liberation* (01/10): "The Israeli and Palestinian elections are close in time but far apart in nature. Despite the fact that Olmert will be replacing Sharon, the Israeli elections seem to be emphasizing Israel's political and institutional stability. Conversely, the Palestinian campaign indicates a chaotic situation. A year after his election, Abbas seems unable to stop the melt down of the Palestinian Authority and its institutions. The internal fights among the Palestinian candidates do not bode well for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. And herein lies the ambiguity of Sharon's policy: the pullout from Gaza held the potential for a peaceful end to the conflict, but the brutality of Sharon's Palestinian policy did such a good job in destroying his enemy, that Abbas is too weakened to be able to take advantage of the opportunity. Abbas, after Arafat, has been incapable of resisting Sharon's deluge. The Palestinian elections will not fulfill the hopes they have elicited. This is also Sharon's contradictory legacy, which his successor will need to resolve in order to move forward."

"Israel's Lesson in Democracy"

Left-of-center *Le Monde* in its editorial (01/10): "Since Sharon's hospitalization, there are daily medical bulletins on his state of health. Such transparency would be inconceivable in France regarding the President's state of health. We all remember the lack of information that filtered out during Chirac's recent stroke. Israel, which could easily hide behind the proverbial 'national security' argument, is giving everyone a fantastic lesson in democracy." STAPLETON